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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: OSCE-JPKF JOINT PATROL COMES UNDER FIRE TRYING TO  
INVESTIGATE SHOOTING INCIDENT

REF: TBILISI 1170

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment: Two OSCE-Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) monitoring patrols were denied access to two separate incident sites in the breakaway region of South Ossetia on July 28 and 29, with one patrol coming under direct fire. A firefight erupted near the village of Cholibauri, approximately 7 km southwest of Tskhinvali on the evening of July 28. No injuries were reported; however, when a joint OSCE-JPKF monitoring patrol arrived to investigate, the patrol was turned away by armed South Ossetian militia. The patrol returned a second time and were again forced to withdraw by the South Ossetian militia, who fired warning shots in the air. A separate joint patrol was traveling to investigate a firefight that took place in the early morning of July 29 near the villages of Andzisi and Sveri when it came under fire by unknown assailants. OSCE monitors reported that the patrol was targeted by small arms and under-barrel grenade fire, but no one was injured. A second patrol later returned and was granted access to the site without further incident. There were also separate incidents of firefights breaking out near the villages of Eredvi and Sarabuki, though no casualties were reported. Tension remains high in South Ossetia, where nightly shooting incidents have become the norm. OSCE assesses that relations between the three sides of the JPKF (Georgia, Russia and Ossetia) remain fractured over suspicions that the Georgian JPKF knew in advance of the July 3 shelling of Tskhinvali (reftel). There have also been rumors that JPKF Commander General Kulakmetov and the de-facto authorities are at odds with one another, which may explain the behavior of the South Ossetian militia near Cholibauri. End summary and comment.

Joint patrols denied access to incident sites

¶2. (C) On the evening of July 28, a firefight broke out near the village of Cholibauri, approximately 7 km southwest of Tskhinvali. No injuries were reported; however, a joint OSCE-JPKF patrol was twice denied access to the incident site by armed South Ossetian militia, who fired warning shots in the air when the patrol returned a second time. OSCE reported that they have issued a freedom of movement violation to the South Ossetian de-facto authorities for restricting the right of OSCE-JPKF patrols to move freely within the zone of conflict. OSCE's senior military observer speculated that the South Ossetians had probably deployed armored vehicles and/or ZU-23 anti-aircraft guns to the area, in violation of the cease-fire agreement, and did not want the patrol to discover them.

¶3. (C) More seriously, a joint OSCE-JPKF patrol came under small arms and grenade fire as it was traveling to investigate a separate shooting incident near the villages of Andzisi and Sveri, about 13 km north-northeast of Tskhinvali. OSCE reported that a firefight took place between 12-4 am

the morning of July 29, where there are opposing South Ossetian and Georgian police posts entrenched in the hills. A joint OSCE-JPKF monitoring patrol went to investigate, when they came under fire by unknown assailants. No injuries were reported. A second joint patrol returned later on July 29 and was granted access to the site without further incident. When questioned by the JPKF, both the Georgians and South Ossetian admitted to "returning fire" during the firefight, but not to starting it, and both denied firing on the earlier joint patrol.

TEFFT